UNITED
NATIONS

EP

Governing Council
of the United Nations
Environment Programme

Distr.
GENERAL

UNEP/GC.19/28
9 December 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Nineteenth session
Nairobi, 27 January - 7 February 1997
Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda*

POLICY ISSUES: COORDINATION AND COOPERATION WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Progress report on good environmental housekeeping practices and guidelines in UNEP and the United Nations system

Report by the Executive Director

Summary

This report responds to Governing Council decision 18/10 of 26 May 1995, by which the Council requested the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to consider and recommend strategies for the promotion of best practice in environmental housekeeping for use by UNEP at its headquarters and regional offices, and to advise and encourage the other organizations of the United Nations system to develop and apply similar strategies for continually improving their own environmental performance and promoting sustainable development. This Governing Council decision was recognized by the General Assembly at its fiftieth session as an issue of special importance. The decision further elaborates on the contents of chapters 29 and 30 of Agenda 21. This report reviews progress made in promoting good environmental housekeeping practices within UNEP, the United Nations system and the wider community.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to:

(a) Take note of the present report; and

(b) Encourage the Executive Director to continue her initiatives in this area.

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I. PROGRESS MADE IN GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL HOUSEKEEPING PRACTICES IN UNEP

1. Good environmental housekeeping should focus on concepts such as "the three Rs", i.e. reducing, reusing and recycling. Good environmental housekeeping practices can range from printing documents on both sides of a sheet of paper and reducing energy consumption to reviewing the environmental performance of suppliers (green procurement) or instituting green building codes.

2. The General Assembly has recognized the importance of good environmental housekeeping practices through its resolution 50/110, whereby UNEP Governing Council decision 18/10 was endorsed. UNEP subsequently relayed the Governing Council decisions to the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) at its first regular session of 1996 and was requested by ACC to provide updates on progress with respect to this initiative to ACC at its subsequent sessions (ACC/1996/2).

3. Before the decision was adopted, UNEP had already introduced a number of measures aimed at both saving costs and being environmentally friendly. These include:

(a) Waste paper from the Gigiri offices is collected by a contractor for recycling. In return, UNEP receives toilet paper for use in the compound. The savings from this programme amount to about US $880 per month;

(b) Staff members have been encouraged to use scrap paper for drafting purposes, to employ double-sided copying and printing and to make increased use of e-mail for memoranda and letters, in an effort to save paper and cut costs;

(c) Almost half the water consumed at the Gigiri compound is recycled. About 250 cubic metres of waste water are recycled and cleaned per day. The recycled water is used for watering the grounds at a saving of about $ 2,000 per month;

(d) Gigiri staff members are able to recycle glass bottles through a recycling programme set up in cooperation with a local non-governmental organization;

(e) No artificial fertilizers or pesticides are used in the maintenance of the grounds. The contractors manufacture compost from on-site garden waste and use it to fertilize the gardens. The presence of natural predators and careful gardening practices eliminate the need for reliance on pesticides; and

(f) The Print Shop reuses off-cuts and small stocks of paper for the production of note-pads for in-house use. Recycled paper is used for all UNEP publications and documents printed in the Print Shop, with the exception of specialist paper types. Non-reusable off-cuts and other waste paper are recycled in the above-mentioned recycling programme. Savings from these efforts are substantial but difficult to assess, since the volumes processed vary with the workload.

4. Subsequent to Governing Council decision 18/10, the following UNEP activities in respect of good environmental housekeeping practices have been undertaken:

(a) The appointment of a coordinator for good environmental housekeeping practices in the Office of the Assistant Executive Director, Programme. With the assistance of the management and administration of UNEP, the coordinator's responsibilities include promoting awareness of good environmental housekeeping among the staff, informing the staff of new activities and initiatives, recommending implementation of best practices, and tracking progress;

(b) The organization of a forum to enable staff members to exchange ideas and suggestions on good environmental housekeeping practices. As a result, a small task force of interested staff members, The Green Consumer's Group, now meets regularly to suggest action to be taken;

(c) The installation of timers on water-heating systems so that there is no heating during off-peak times (i.e. weekends and evenings). In all, savings of about $ 2,000 per month are being generated. It is estimated that the installation cost will have been recovered within five months;

(d) Timers have been installed on the corridor lighting, whereby it is reduced during off-peak times (i.e. evenings and weekends). Monthly savings of about $ 400 are being generated and the cost of the installation will have been recovered in 12 months;

(e) Energy savings are being realized through the installation of individual switches for lights in offices. Staff members are now able turn on individual ceiling lights instead of all the lights in a room. Monthly savings of about $ 500 are being generated and the cost of the installation will be recovered in 16 months;

(f) Procurement of recycled copying paper for all UNEP letters and memoranda;

(g) Assessment of the existence of ozone-depleting substances at Gigiri and development of a plan of action to phase out these substances, with the help of the OzonAction Programme;

(h) Initiation of a UNEP-wide effort to reduce the volume and size of the documentation prepared for official meetings convened by UNEP;

(i) Initiation of a plan to expand the recycling facilities in the Gigiri compound. An expansion would include paper, glass and metal recycling facilities, for both the United Nations offices at Gigiri and the members of their staff; and

(j) Encouraging the regional and outposted offices of UNEP to develop good environmental housekeeping practices within their offices as well as with their partners and collaborators. A specific example of a regional initiative involves the Regional Office for North America. As its offices recently required substantial renovation, RONA set up a task force of the relevant private-sector and United Nations bodies to ensure that the

alterations comprised state-of-the-art green building practices. It is anticipated that, on completion, the offices will become a showcase for such practices within the United Nations system. Other offices are all reusing and recycling paper and, where possible, using green procurement practices. All UNEP offices are continually seeking innovative methods both to save costs and to minimize environmental damage.

II. PROMOTION OF GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL HOUSEKEEPING PRACTICES TO THE WIDER COMMUNITY

5. As well as working on in-house practices, UNEP is promoting the concept of good environmental housekeeping among organizations outside the United Nations system. The hotel and tourist industry, production industry and universities are a few examples of other sectors that have been encouraged to implement good environmental housekeeping practices. Specific activities include:

(a) The UNEP Industry and Environment Centre (UNEP/IE) devotes a major part of its efforts to promoting good environmental housekeeping - encouraging cleaner and safer industrial production and consumption patterns. For example, the Cleaner Production Programme has determined from the results of demonstration projects carried out around the world that between 30 and 40 per cent of the wastes generated can be eliminated through good housekeeping practices, such as improving process control, changing raw materials, training employees and improving inventory control. In addition, the OzonAction Programme is preparing guidelines on the phase-out of ozone-depleting substances for use both inside and outside the United Nations system. Relevant publications issued by UNEP/IE include; "Environmental Action Pack for Hotels", "Environmental Auditing" and "Company Environmental Reporting". These publications, which take the form of user-friendly direct-action guides, encourage the implementation of good environmental housekeeping practices in a variety of industrial sectors;

(b) The Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) has developed an action plan on good environmental housekeeping activities in conjunction with hotel and tourist associations in Thailand. The agencies have worked together to provide training and exhibitions for hoteliers on the green hotel concept. It is now at the stage where the "Green Leaf Criteria", which are about to be finalized, will encourage hotels to make savings in energy and water, to minimize waste and so forth. By early 1997, the Green Leaf Criteria will be formally launched industry-wide. From this model developed in Thailand, UNEP hopes to expand the concept to other countries in the region;

(c) The Environmental Training Unit is running a project on Campus Ecology in conjunction with Moi University in Kenya. With the assistance of UNEP, the University is developing documentation on Campus Ecology which, after assisting to green its surroundings, will be used as a model for other campuses in the region;

(d) UNEP has developed a Global Environmental Citizenship Project which endeavours to work in partnership with major groups to promote and encourage environmental awareness, education and action in civil society with

the goal of long-term behavioural change. Thus far, through the efforts of the programme, a pilot project has been established with a global network of consumers' organizations and UNEP information on environmental practices is reaching supermarkets and consumer products. Also, in cooperation with an international non-governmental organization and community colleges in Canada, an electronic publication "Greening Campuses" has been produced. The publication is a practical guide to applying environmental citizenship principles in the everyday life of community colleges in Canada; and

(e) UNEP has developed a handbook, "Taking Action: An Environmental Guide for You and Your Community", to enable individuals, community groups, schools and the like to make a positive impact on their local environment. It stresses the fact that it is for each of us to change his or her consumer practices and related actions to improve the environment at all levels.

III. EFFORTS REPORTED BY OTHER UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATIONS

6. UNEP has encouraged other organizations in the United Nations system to implement good environmental housekeeping practices and to report on such activities. On 8 October 1996, a letter was sent to the sister agencies urging more action on good environmental housekeeping. Efforts by other organizations include:

(a) The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in close collaboration with UNEP, produced, in March 1995, a publication called "The Green Office Programme" designed to introduce the idea of good environmental housekeeping practices. The document also introduces the UNDP/Inter-Agency Procurement Services Office (IAPSO) environmental standards concerning such items as paper, office supplies and machines and motor vehicles. UNEP has had a major role in developing these standards;

(b) The World Bank recently committed itself to carrying out a greening process of the World Bank Group. Previously implemented practices have included energy conservation, waste recycling and environmental guidelines for food services and rented properties. These efforts will be reviewed and improved, while additional actions will include conducting an annual independent environmental audit, encouraging staff to use alternative transport, and implementation of the measures in all its outposted offices; and

(c) The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) reports that its new headquarters building, currently under construction, will have a number of innovative technical solution in its design, to make it more environment-friendly. These solutions will save energy and money for WMO. They include: insulated building facades, elimination of false ceilings for improved ventilation and "intelligent" lighting systems.

7. UNEP will continue to make a compilation of the best practices engaged in by other United Nations organizations, and will utilize this information to promote good environmental housekeeping practices among other organizations both inside and outside the United Nations system.